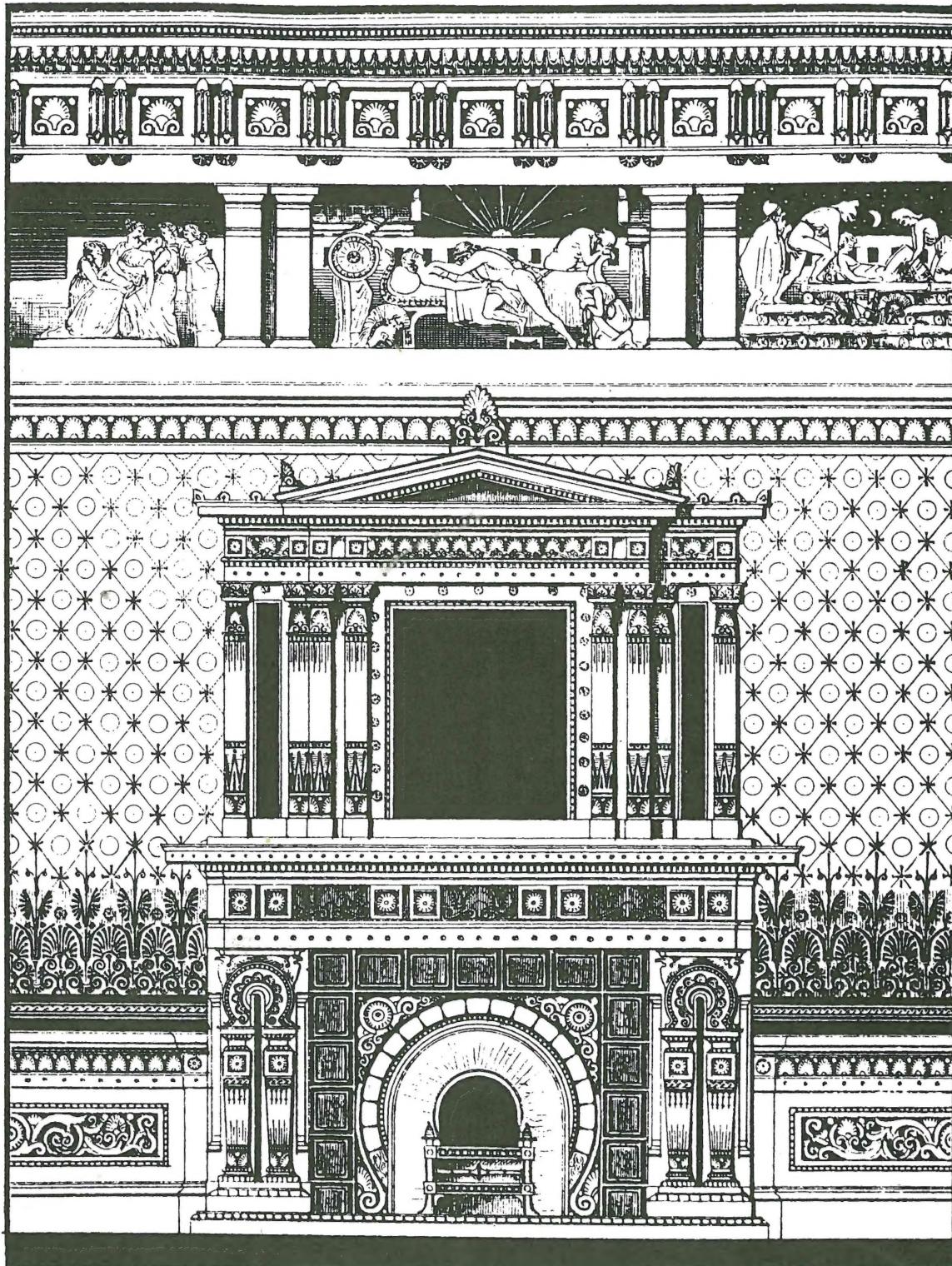


# The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER

N°15, JANUARY 1996

GREEK DESIGN BY JOHN THOMSON



**The Thomson Twins • Winter Lectures  
• A Letter from India**

# CASES

## CALEDONIA ROAD CHURCH

We reported in previous Newsletters how Alan McCartney of the Historic Buildings Trust has been endeavouring to find a long-overdue solution to the long-running problem of the ruin of Thomson's first church. The sound sense of Mr McCartney's proposals has been demonstrated by the adoption by the Glasgow Development Agency of his idea of demolishing the redundant railway viaduct to the west of the church. However, the crucial possibility enabled by this action – to re-route the wretched north-south main road east of the church – has been rejected by the powers that be. Even if restored, this means that the Caledonia Road Church would be doomed to remain cut off from the proposed new housing to the east.

However, further possibilities have now opened up. Historic Scotland, long anxious to see something positive happen with the ruin, has asked the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust to investigate new uses for the church if restored externally. And, at present, there is the exciting possibility that the Iona Community might be interested in the building. This, combined with the prospect of a sympathetic development on the land to the west of the church freed by the viaduct demolition, gives ground for hope.

However, we remain concerned that the road plan remains inimical to a suitable enabling development to the north of what was never intended to be a free-standing monument. As we never tire of pointing out, a proper solution to the disgrace of the state and surroundings of this great monument must be found if Glasgow is to be taken seriously in 1999. The Caledonia Road Church was designed as a gateway to the city from the south; it remains a symbol of the state of the Gorbals and Glasgow.

## GLASGOW CROSS

The future begins to look a little more optimistic for the Thomson-or-Turnbull warehouses in Bell Street and Watson Street.



Mr Thomson (no relation), a developer from Edinburgh, has acquired both structures and has asked the architects Simister Monaghan to consider their rehabilitation as apartments, a scheme possibly to be combined with a development on the empty site to the south where the same architects propose the completion of the monumental 1920s quadrant designed by Graham Henderson. The restoration of Thomson's beautiful warehouses therefore becomes an integral part of the long-overdue general improvement and enhancement of Glasgow Cross which is now being seriously

considered by the city.

Unfortunately, Messrs Wimpey have an option on the empty site to the south and propose to build a housing scheme to an inferior design. We must hope for the best.

## CORRECTION

Colin McKellar points out that the James Robertson who was Thomson's client for Egyptian Halls [*"Dear George..." Newsletter N°14*] was not, in fact, one and the same as James Robertson (no 's'), the founder who was the client for the tenement in Hospital Street behind the Caledonia Road Church.

## WINTER LECTURES

This year's lecture series will be held on Wednesdays at fortnightly intervals. The lectures will take place, as before, in the First Floor Lecture Theatre of the Mackintosh School of Architecture – next to the School of Art – at 177 Renfrew Street at 7.00 p.m. The entry price is £2, payable at the door. Two of this year's distinguished speakers are historians from outwith Glasgow – and Britain – and one is one of our three patrons.

On FEBRUARY 7th, MARTIN MEADE, architectural historian and critic resident in Paris, speaks on 'Glasgow and Paris: the Development of the Parisian block of flats in the 19th century'.

On FEBRUARY 21st, Professor BARRY BERGDOLL, architectural historian at Columbia University, New York, and the recent biographer of Thomson's mentor Karl Friedrich Schinkel, will talk about Schinkel – and Thomson?.

Finally, on MARCH 6th, our Patron, ANDY MacMILLAN, Emeritus Professor of Architecture at the University of Glasgow, will pursue some 'Architectural Observations' on Thomson, Frank Lloyd Wright, and beyond.

# NEWCASTLE VISIT

FOLLOWING the success of our first foreign visit last April when we spent a weekend in Liverpool, we are now planning to explore the architecture of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Newcastle is notable for its dramatic bridges across the Tyne but in particular for its magnificent Classical streets – especially Grey Street – designed by the local architect John Dobson. On our visit, we will see a number of Dobson's Neo-Classical buildings as well as other monuments in the city. We will also travel out to see Belsay Hall, the pioneering and astonishingly severe Greek Revival house apparently designed by its owner Sir Charles Monck.

We intend to travel to Newcastle on the 1400 hours train on **FRIDAY, APRIL 12th**, and return on **SUNDAY, APRIL 14th**, on the 1605 train which arrives back in Glasgow at 1852, after staying two nights at the Royal Station Hotel next to Dobson's magnificent Central Station.

As before, we shall keep costs to a minimum and the all-in price for travel, coach to Belsay and two nights bed-and-breakfast sharing a double room will be about £90, with a £20 supplement for a single room.

We hope members will support this event. Please send a deposit of £20 a.s.a.p. to the Chairman at Moray Place.

## THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY COMMITTEE

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The Earl of Glasgow, Professor Andor Gomme and Professor Andrew MacMillan.

# IN MEMORIAM

In the old Dorotheenstadt cemetery near the Oranienburger Tor in what used to be East Berlin is the grave of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, (top right) who died in 1841 and whose work was such an inspiration to Thomson. It consists of a tall stele, designed by the architect for another, bearing a bronze portrait medallion modelled by Christian Daniel Rauch (who lies elsewhere in the cemetery) and is topped by a bronze anthenion.

Such a grave monument, of great sophistication and beauty, would be highly appropriate for Thomson who, of course, lies in the Southern Necropolis in Glasgow without mark or honour. But if we are to erect a monument over Thomson's grave – as Glasgow must – perhaps inspiration may be found elsewhere in the Dorotheenstadt cemetery, for a striking new monument has recently risen over the grave of Schinkel's pupil and successor, Friedrich August Stüler (1800-65) (below right), who designed the Neues Museum in Berlin behind Schinkel's famous Altes Museum.

I do not know what happened to Stüler's original gravestone, but now his new black stele with raised and gilded lettering is enclosed by a sort of Post-Modern primitive temple: a simple but elegant structure of steel girders with a pedimented top. The main supports and the pediment are painted dark blue while the intermediate arches are gilded. This new grave monument was designed and made in 1995 by the Roehl-Skuin metal sculpture atelier in Berlin.

If Stüler deserves a fine modern gravestone, then surely so does 'Greek' Thomson.

## THE NEWSLETTER

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# Wm Henderson, Deceased

by Colin McKellar

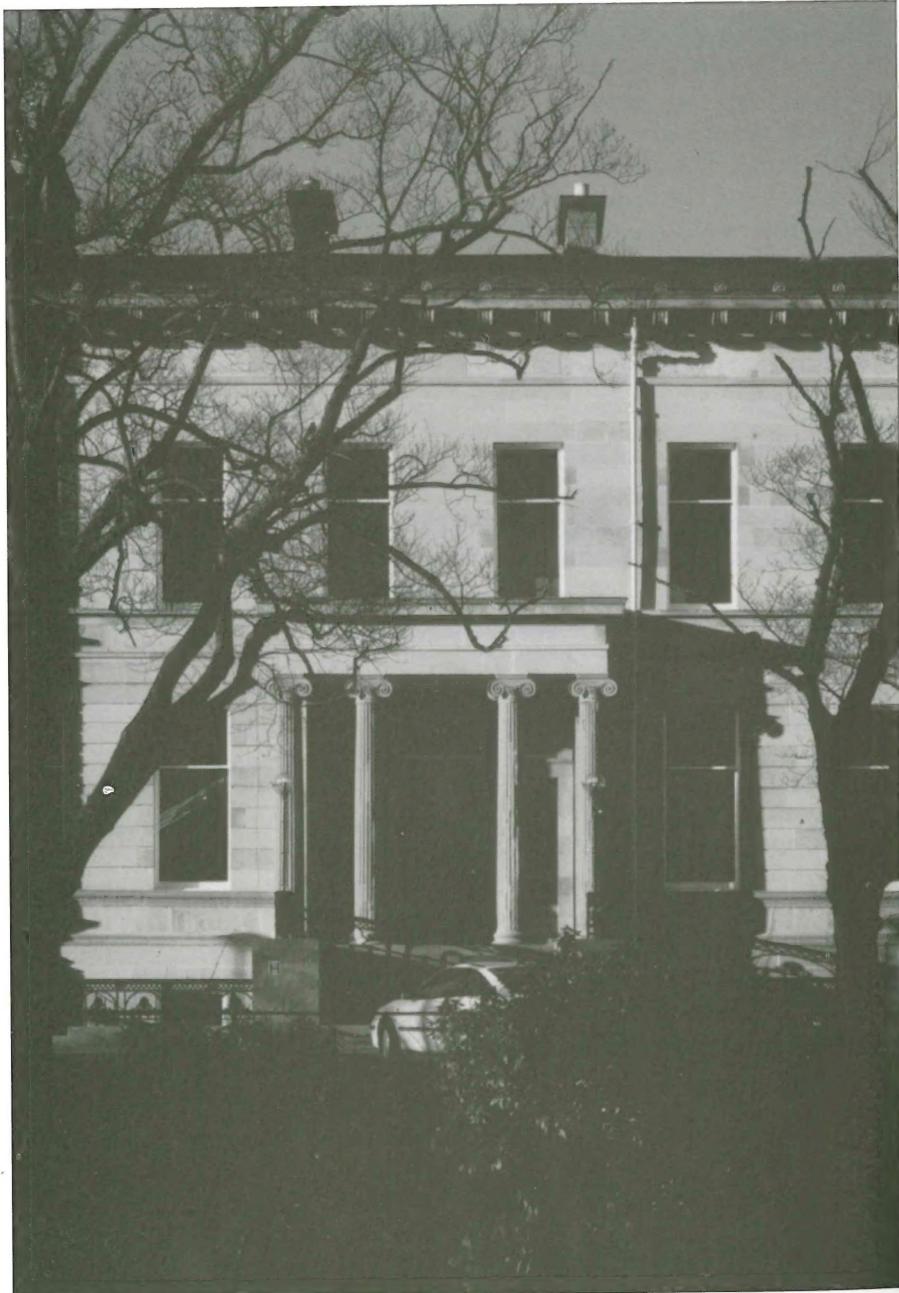
WHEN William Henderson died in May 1870 he was constructing the first houses in Great Western Terrace. Some three weeks after his death his estate was sequestered and on 20th July 1870 the Trustee reported to creditors concerning Great Western Terrace as follows :

"These houses are in course of being erected under a Building Agreement with Mr J.W. Anderson and several of them had been sold by Mr Henderson, but there is some doubt whether the Agreements will be now carried out. As each of the houses is differently circumstanced from the other the Trustee will refer to them in their order:

1st Daniel McFarlane's Contract. The Trustee has not yet had an opportunity of inspecting this Agreement; he understands, however that the time when the house should have been delivered is long past, that Mr McFarlane has taken the finishing into his own hands, and that there will be no reversion afterwards to recover. The Trustee has however been informed that since Mr Henderson's death Mr McFarlane or his contractors or workmen have appropriated certain pavement stones which were lying on the ground and which belonged to the deceased, and it is the intention of the Trustee so soon as he can ascertain the exact quantities to apply to Mr McFarlane for payment thereof.

2nd J.W. McGregor's Contract. The remarks of the Trustee regarding Mr McFarlane's Contract are exactly applicable to this one not only as respects the position of the parties but also as respects the appropriation of loose materials.

3rd Scottish Heritable Security Co. Limited. This Company is heritably vested in four of the houses one of which was sold to Mr Johnstone for £3500 and the other to Mr Beckitt for £4000 the last mentioned price to include stables etc but neither of the parties possessed any heritable right to their purchases. The advances of the Company amount to £12000 less the sum of £1300 or thereby which



N<sup>o</sup> 4 Great Western Terrace

they still retain to complete the Buildings, and the Agents of the Company in Glasgow Messrs. Dick & Stevenson hold a further conveyance against their accounts of about £150 or thereby and also against any loss which may emerge on the Bond for £464 secured to them over four houses in Thornville Terrace. It is not expected that any loss will arise on the latter, and therefore it may be assumed that the debts secured over the four houses amount to £10850 or

thereby. The Trustee is informed that £3000 of this is now bearing penal interest at the rate of 15 per cent per annum but there is no interest on the other part of the debt the same having been computed in the principal sum. The houses are unfinished and the Trustee and Commissioners resolved at a Meeting held by them on 12th instant not to complete them but to allow the Heritable Creditors to do so. The Trustee accordingly intimated this

resolution to the Company but he has since been informed that the Company considering the whole matter in the light of estimates have resolved *not* to complete the houses but in the event of the Trustee not taking the whole matter into his own hands to sell the subjects as they presently stand. The Trustee requests the advice of the Creditors on the subject.

4th Robert Hutcheson's Contract. Mr Hutcheson has paid the sum of £1500 on account of his Contract and he has paid a half years feu duty also, which he is entitled to be repaid. The Trustee and Commissioners have resolved not to interfere in this Contract as they believe no profit could be made out of it for the Estate. The West Gable is mutual and the one half is the property of the Trustee so far as erected but a considerable portion and the most expensive is still to be built.

5th The Last is built on the ground of Mr Anderson but no conveyance has been got and Mr Anderson has claimed £1465/9/- against it before he will grant a Title. The Commissioners have authorized the Trustee to dispose of the interest belonging to the estate and the Trustee has had some conversation with Mr Anderson's Agents on the subject. They have spoken of advising their client to offer £150 for the mutual Gable in Mr Hutcheson's house if the Trustee will consent to a sale of this subject before finishing and if the Trustee will give Mr Anderson a right to the cutting beyond. On the other hand they will renounce all claims to plant and loose material on the ground. The

Trustee has asked £200 but no agreement has as yet been come to and the Trustee requests the instructions of Creditors on the subject. On four of these houses there is a surplus Feu Duty of 40/- each which Mr Anderson is bound to buy at 22 years purchase, but Mr Anderson's Agents assert that this is partly compensated by an extra 8 feet of ground to each house which at the same rate of feu absorbs 30/- on each. This however still leaves 40/- p. annum of value which is equal to £44."

At his death, William Henderson was the owner of numbers 252-270 and 126-138 Sauchiehall Street which are usually (but misleadingly) known as Grecian Chambers and the Washington Hotel. The Trustee reported that both of these buildings were under-utilised, were in need of considerable repairs and had been conveyed to Baird & Brown, timber merchants of Port Dundas, in security of their claim.

## Notes

### William Henderson

A native of Caithness and aged 57 at the time of the 1861 census, Henderson had been a builder in Glasgow since at least 1853. His other connection with Alexander Thomson is Northpark Terrace which Henderson built in approximately 1865/66.

### J.W. Anderson

James Whitelaw Anderson, a power loom cloth manufacturer, purchased some sixteen and a quarter acres of the Kelvinside Estate in August 1868.

His acquisition included the ground for Westbourne Terrace as well as Great Western Terrace.

### Great Western Terrace

Daniel McFarlane's house was number 1; J.W. McGregor's house was number 4; Scottish Heritable's houses were numbers 2,3,5 and 6; Robert Hutcheson's house was number 8; The house for which no conveyance had been got was Robert Blackie's: number 7.

The plant and loose material were at Kirklee and Horslethill quarries as well as at Great Western Terrace.

### 252-270 Sauchiehall Street

This property is identified in the Post Office Directories during Thomson's lifetime as Grecian Buildings (*below*) and first appears in the 1868/69 edition [Sauchiehall Street has since been renumbered].

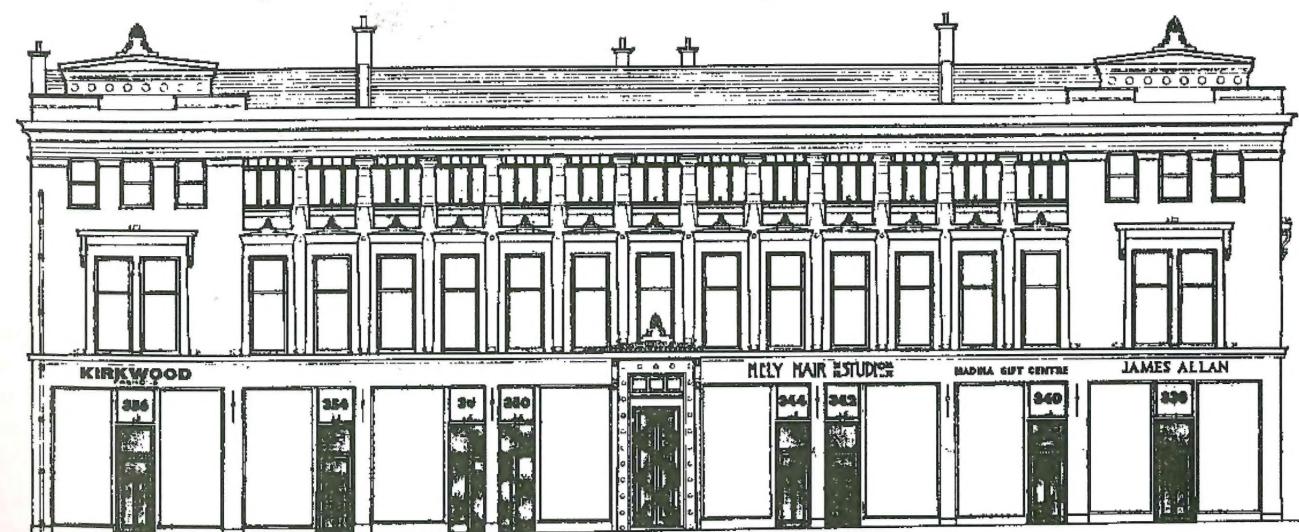
### 126-138 Sauchiehall Street

The first occupier appears in the Post Office Directory for 1865/66 with a further thirteen residential and commercial occupants recorded in the following year. The Washington Temperance Hotel is not mentioned until 1874/75.

### Creditors

A. & G. Thomson were not among the creditors. Excluding loans and professional fees, Henderson's debts were almost entirely due to timber merchants, quarriers and other materials suppliers.

Source: Sequestration of William Henderson, Scottish Record Office CS318/19/120.



# THE THOMSON TWINS?

by Juliet Kinchin

One measure of artistic stature is the power to inspire acolytes and imitators, and while Thomson did not have a large office, he certainly spawned numerous admirers and conscious look-alikes, of varying ability. In particular, he was idolised by a younger generation of architects and designers connected with Glasgow. Some of these individuals were to sink without trace, while others (as already illustrated by articles in this Newsletter) carried the flame far afield, managing to transform the inspiration of Thomson into their own distinctive design identities.

One of the most intriguing of the younger look-alikes discussed in this article also happened to be a namesake. To complicate matters still further, there were a considerable number of other Glaswegians by the name of Thomson (including a few Alexanders) with a direct involvement in the architecture, design and build-

ing trades. Small wonder then that this Society's hero required an epithet, 'Greek', to distinguish him. In the effort to substantiate his life and work all such look-alikes and name-sakes are alluring, and potentially misleading, to the researcher. Hopefully, by briefly outlining a few of the false trails I myself hared after, I will be able to save fellow sleuths time and energy while also shedding some light on the extent of Thomson's influence immediately following his death.

While pursuing my particular interest in Thomson's furniture and textile designs, I found my heart racing at the discovery of a letter and a series of plausibly Greek Revival designs published in the professional press under the name 'Alexander Thomson, designer, Glasgow' (Illus. 1, *above right* and 2, *below*). The lack of documented textiles made the discovery of a pattern for a tapestry cur-

tain particularly exciting. Several of these references were in *Decoration*, a London-based journal started up in 1881. Editorial comments clearly assumed that the readership of



Queen's Park Church, engraved from a drawing by J Moir Smith

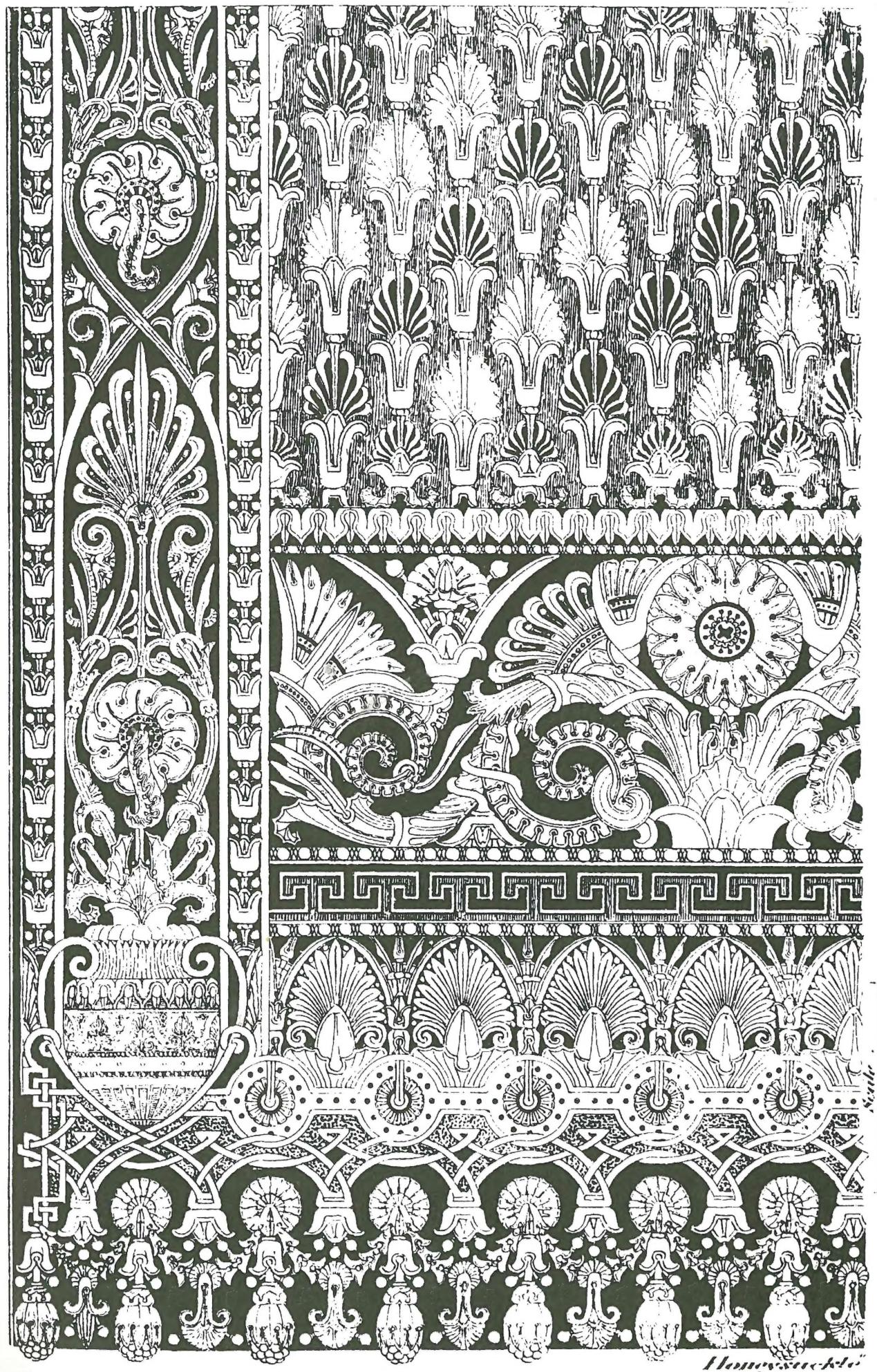
*Decoration* was familiar with Greek Thomson's work, and although the decorative designs were published subsequent to Thomson's death in 1875, I was not unduly perturbed, knowing, for example, that similar designs by Bruce Talbert had been serialised in *The Cabinet Maker* for years after his death in 1881. Secondly, the magazine *Decoration* was regularly featuring vignettes of Thomson buildings in Glasgow at the time (Illus. 3, *above*). It turns out that these had been drawn by the editor, J. Moir Smith (1839–1912), a vocal and prolific enthusiast on the subject of Thomson, who had trained as an architect in Glasgow before moving south in 1863. (Moir Smith, himself an intriguing character and influential designer, will form the subject of a future article.)

So far so good, but then I picked up an address for this Alexander Thomson, at 10 Albert Drive, Crosshill. A quick trail through the Glasgow Post Office Directories – always a mine of information – revealed that this was where he lived with his mother. In his professional capacity he was listed as a 'furniture designer' at 116 Waterloo Street (and subsequently as a 'draughtsman' at



Alexander A. Thomson, design for a dado band

Right: Alexander A. Thomson, design for a tapestry curtain, 'Honeysuckle'

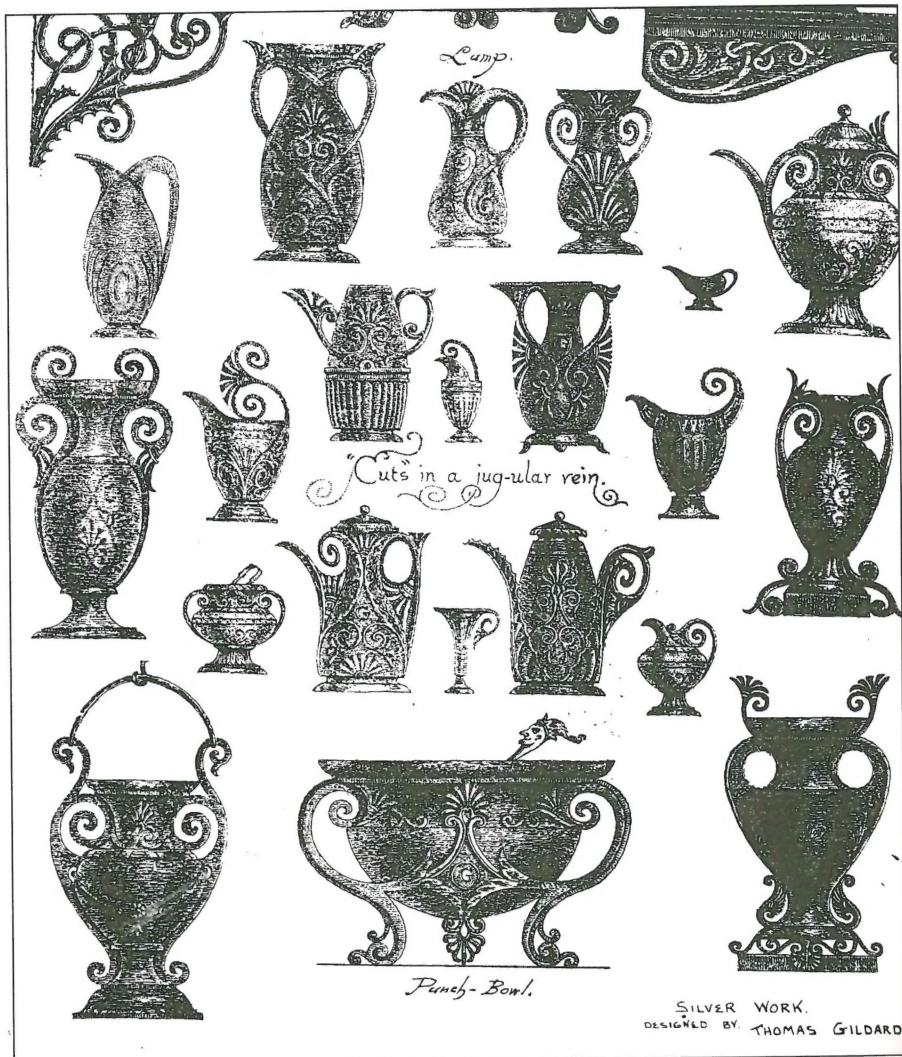


# Thomson Twins

Continued from Page 7

114 West Regent Street). In fact, the Directories revealed multiple namesakes with architecture and design connections in the 1870s and early 1880s: Alexander G. Thomson I.A., 'civil engineer and architect and valuator of property' at 194 West George Street then 104 West Campbell Street; the Alexander Thomsons Senior and Junior, builders and contractors, living just around the corner from their namesake, at 48 Queen Square in Strathbungo. Sharing the same surname were individuals like the architects James Thomson I.A. and David Thompson; the wholesale cabinetmakers Andrew Thomson; the painters and paperhangers Archibald Thomson & Co.; W.R.M. Thomson & Co., consulting engineers and patent agents.

Returning to the pages of *Decoration*, one of the 'bogus' Alexander Thomson designs was printed directly above a 'Greek' dado band by the great man's son, John. Here, then, were two individual designers who through no fault of their own, by virtue of kinship and naming, had a particularly hard act to follow. One cannot help wondering how either of these two look-alikes coped psychologically with the dominant influence of the 'original' Thomson which evidently extended beyond the grave. The young Alexander Thomson must have been tempted to trade off such an illustrious reputation and to allow a degree of confusion to persist. For John, the label "son of the famous Greek Thomson" must have been galling at times (*Decoration* June 1881, p.21). Moyr Smith's comments on his



Above: Thomas Gildard designs for silverware, *Decoration*, July 1881.

Below: Alexander A. Thomson design for a dado band

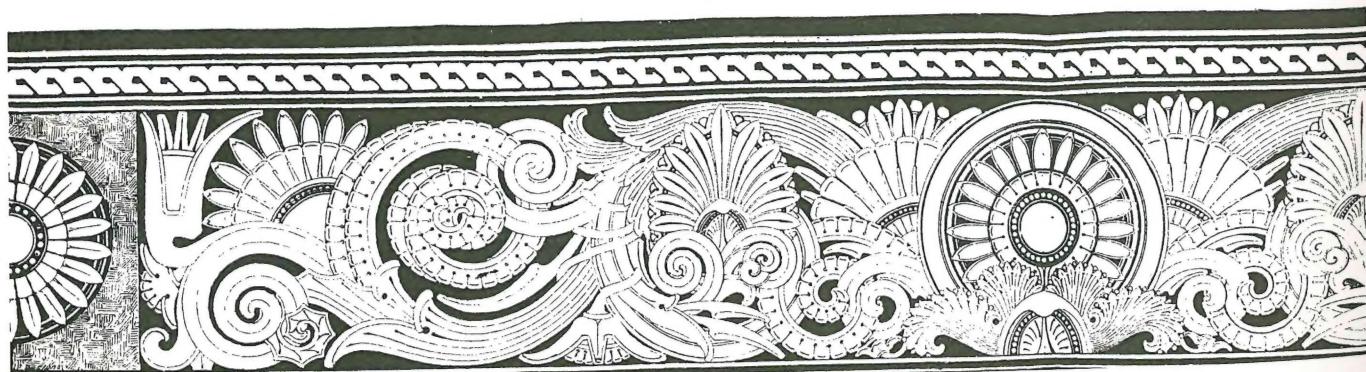
design for a chimney wall (*front cover*) were couched entirely in terms of the father: "The son could have no better model than his father, Mr Alexander Thomson, who was the first architect of the age if originality, refinement and pure artistic feeling count for anything. Mr John Thomson has judiciously followed his father's path".

As in the dining room at Holmwood, the frieze incorporated

scenes from Flaxman's *Iliad*, in this case Achilles mourning the death of Patroclus, immediately above the fireplace.

Further Thomsonesque designs from Glasgow featured in *Decoration* included examples by George Thomson "whose work was clever", Harry Thomson, Henry Christie, Alexander Rea, the architect William

Continued on Page 11



# TAU, THOMSON, OR TRABEATION

**Sam McKinstry continues the debate with Professor James Stevens Curl on the relationship between St Vincent St Church and Solomon's Temple.**

JAMES STEVENS Curl's latest article on St Vincent Skeet Church (in *Newsletter* №14) compels me again to take up my pen.

He begins by oversimplifying my point of view. I do not take exception to his "arguments that there is an affinity between Thomson's St Vincent St Church in Glasgow, and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem", as he states at the outset of his latest piece. I make it quite clear at the start of my article in *Newsletter* №13 that it is the degree of affinity between the two buildings that concerns me. He sees St Vincent St Church as a cryptic and wholesale re-interpretation of Solomon's Temple, while I see it as a building that contains one or two Old Testament references that might conceivably relate to Solomon's Temple, but that, at best, are passing allusions.

Coming to the substance of his paper, I note that, as ever, he completely ignores the points I make and brings yet more inconclusive "evidence" of the type I have disputed before. Let me ask again, as I did in *Newsletter* №13, whether or not it is true that examples of every number from one to ten – and beyond – can be found in the architectural detailing of St Vincent St Church. If it is, why, in *Newsletter* №12, do you dwell on the Masonic number nine? Or, even more important, why do you not answer my theological objection to your "Solomon's Temple" theory of St Vincent St Church, which is that Presbyterians, drawing on the book of Hebrews, believe the Temple to have been superseded by Christ? And a supplementary: why did Thomson, in the seventy pages of architectural theory contained in his Haldane Lectures, say next to nothing about the Temple? I'd like answers. It's not enough to say that I seem "blind": deafness is also a debilitating affliction!

In spite of the fact that the good

professor does not answer me on my own terms, I will comment on his latest "proofs", chief among which is the presence of the T (or Tau) shape on the tower of the St Vincent St Church. The Tau is, according to Professor Curl, the symbol of the

Temple of Solomon, and its setting above the H-shaped pylon at the tower's base makes a T/H combination symbolising the *Templum Hierosolymae*, the Temple of Jerusalem. There are some pretty

*Continued on Page 12*



# DEAR ALEC...

**I**N his biography of Thomson, Ronald McFadzean notes that he received a letter in 1858 from his brother-in-law serving in India at the time of what we choose to call the Indian Mutiny and that this included a sketch of a mosque which might well have inspired the Indian-looking dome on the top of the St Vincent Street Church tower designed at about the same time.

We now reproduce this drawing, together with the text of this letter from J.S. Nicholson. Given the crudity of the sketch of the mosque, it is unlikely that this was the direct inspiration for Thomson's attenuated dome – which, after all, looks Hindu rather than Moghul in form – but it is possible that momentous events in India along with this letter may have stimulated an interest in Oriental architecture. James Fergusson's *History of Eastern and Indian Architecture* was not published until 1876 but his *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, which first appeared in 1855, contained chapters on Indian architecture – Buddhist, Jain, Hindu and Saracenic – while the acquaintants published by the Daniell brothers had long acquainted the British with the appearance of Indian buildings. We hope to include a study of the influence of India on Thomson's architecture in a subsequent number of this *Newsletter*.

The letter is transcribed here with the original spelling and punctuation.

Camp, Banda, 15th Octr, 1858

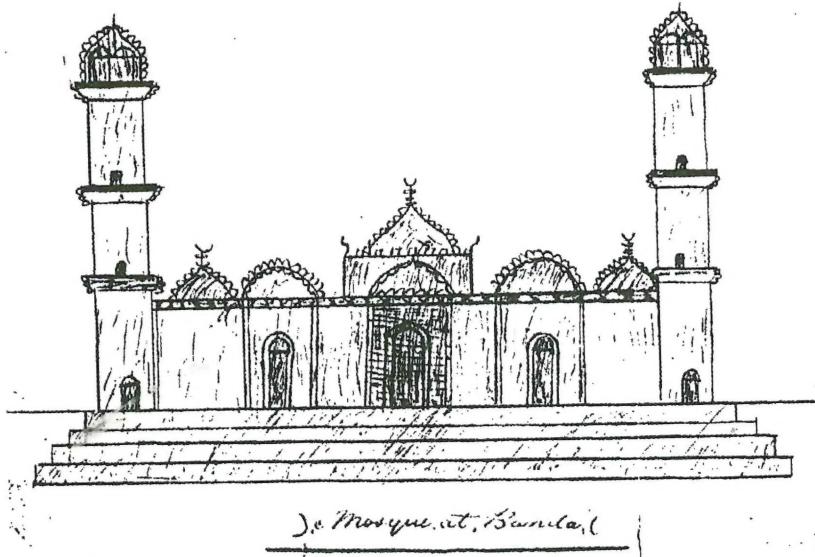
Dear Alec

I am happy to state to you that The War is nearly at a close, and the villagers are beginning to return to their Homes. I therefore take the pleasure of giving you a Sketch of the Mosque. You must Excuse me as I have only got a pen to do it with. this building stands next to the Rajah's Palace, it was used as a Church by him before our Column took Banda, but since then we have turned it into a Barracks for our troops. Who have Been under Canvas long Enough I may say since December 1857. all the Buildings here are very well finished

and the streets well laid out and kept very clean by the Natives who are very shy at us as we pass by them. they seem to think that a European was made to kill them as they liked and that nothing would be done to them because they were Black.. this is the Building that I am staying in –

Dear Alec. When we entered Banda a Search was mad to see if we could discover any traces of the Europeans that were here before the Mutiny

have Escaped have taken to the Hills and some have taken to the Woods so we expect to have a good Hunting Match as soon as the rainy weather is over accounts come in daily of some poor Villager being Robed by the Rebels they come down of the Hills at night when everything is quiet and take away every thing that they can lay their hands on their is only one half of our Column in Banda. the remainder of them have gone with



*The Mosque at Banda*

broke out. after a long Search we had no Idea of any being in the Mosque. we were all at a Stand Still when we entered to behould our poor Country Men Women and Children Lying Slaughtered on the Floor before us whivch was a dreadful sight to whitness. I think there were upwards of 100, altogether they were all taken out next Morning and Buried in the Churchyard Which was all destroyed by the Mutineers before their leaving Banda. the very Tomb stones was all destroyed and every Government Building burnt down to the Ground. they have Suffered since for their deeds. the day that we took Banda we left 1000 of the Mutineers Dead on the planes our loss was very small we lost more by Sun Stroke then we did in the Field of Battal. Dear Alec I am glad to say that this affair is nearely over but their is a good deal to be done yet those that

the General to Saugor in hopes of having a Skirmish with the Mutineers before they come Back here. we have pretty good times of it here at present on account of the rains which keeps us from Moving about. there is nothing to be seen here but Hills and Woods all arround as far as the eye can reach. the Rajah of Kirwee was Brought out this morning having been tried by a General Court Marshall for Mutinous Conduct against the Government of India his sentence having been read to him in his own Language he was brought out in front of our Column to receive his punishment which was to be blown away from on of our 9 Pounders he was then tied up hard and fast to the Muzzel of the Gun without uttering a word. in a Short time afterwards he spoke out and said that he was very sorry that he had not killed more Europeans

before he was taken prisoner by the British. everything being ready all eyes were turned opn the Gun. the porture having been lighted the Officer gave the word Fire and the Rajah was blown up into the air his remains was Scattered about in all directions after this being done we all formed up and Marched away to our quarters. I have no more news to give you at present trusting this will find you well give my kind love to Jane, Jessie and not forgetting Nancy and the young ones of which I have not had the pleasure of seeing Yeat but I trust that I will before long so good by for the present –

Believe me to be  
Yours most truly  
J S Nicholson

PS I will send with this the narrative of a Young Lady who made her Escape out of Cawnpore, which I think you will like to read. JSN.

## NOTES

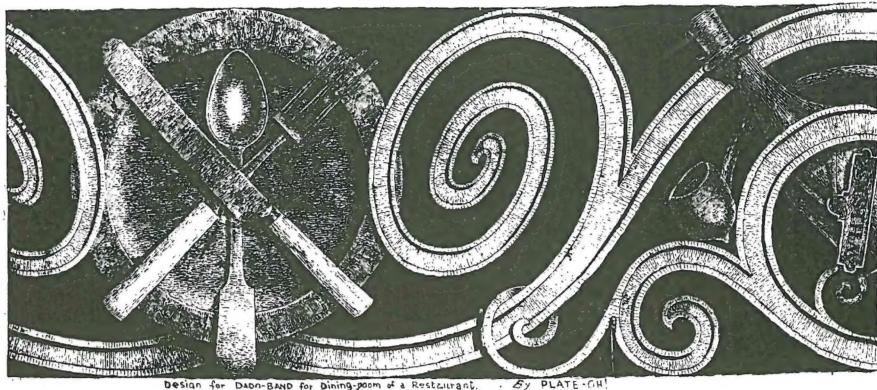
Banda is situated some ninety miles south of Cawnpore. The Nawab of Banda was removed by the British government in 1858 for his role in the Mutiny. His mosque was situated in the eastern part of the town. Kirwee, now known as Karwi Tarahwan, is forty miles to the east of Banda towards Allahabad. Narayan Rao assumed the government of the town during the Mutiny and maintained his independence for eight months; he was, presumably, the unfortunate 'Rajah of Kirwee'. The wealth accumulated by the Rao family was known as the "Kirwee and Banda Prize Money".

One puzzle with this letter is the precise identity of the writer. In her family memoirs, Thomson's granddaughter, Mrs W.L. Stewart, states that Jane Nicholson's younger brother, Michael Angelo Nicholson [junior] (1832–1903) served as a soldier in India but the letter is clearly signed by J.S. Nicholson. Mrs Stewart also refers to Jamieson Nicholson, the half brother of her father Michael Angelo Nicholson, who became a merchant with the East India Company. Is there confusion here? We are again most grateful to Mrs Stewart's daughter, Catherine Rentoul, for allowing us to publish this letter.

Gavin Stamp

# Thomson Twins

Continued from Page 8



Design for Dado-BAND for Dining-room of a Restaurant. By PLATE-OH!

Above: Thomas Gildard dado band for  
Dining-room of a restaurant,  
Decoration, June 1882

Below: Henry Christie panel design.

Young, and, perhaps most interestingly, Thomas Gildard (1822–1895), who has proved such an important source for Thomson studies. The Gildard images show that he was influenced by Thomson both stylistically and in the range of non-architectural work he undertook. The designs for silverware ("Cuts" in a jugular vein), the classical dado band for a restaurant (by "PLATE-OH!"), and the frieze design (entitled "Freeze, Freeze, thou bitter Sky", December 1882), also reveal a relish for punning of a truly dreadful order, a weakness shared by his friend Moyr Smith.

After a run of eight years *Decoration* finally folded in 1889. In tone and style it had clearly targeted a British audience with Aesthetic tendencies, a profile reinforced by the range of adverts for firms like Liberty's, Thonet, Barnard Bishop &



P

Barnard, and Walter Macfarlane's of Glasgow; also in reviews of authors such as R.W. Edis or the Audsleys, artists like Alma Tadema and Marcus Stone, and of venues like the Grosvenor Gallery in London. Circulation figures are difficult to estimate, but such a magazine surely helped to raise awareness throughout Britain of Thomson and the generation of Glasgow architects and designers he inspired. Moreover, the pronounced Scottish contribution to the magazine underlines the fact that before Glasgow's so-called cultural Renaissance in the late 1890s, there was a vibrant design culture in the city which fed significantly into international developments such as the Aesthetic Movement.

# It's a mystery to us...



Can you identify the town in this stereoscope photograph we recently unearthed? The 'Tobacco' sign on the left-hand building would appear to indicate an English-language environment, but is it Scotland? England? Australia?

## Temple Talk

*Continued from Page 9*

obvious objections here: the so-called T-shape can be read very differently as two compartments, a horizontal and a vertical - they are divided by an entablature - and the H at the base is more like an A to me! Or how about the fact that the T-shape adorns almost every door on every Thomson house or public building I know - does that make them all mnemonics of the Temple? And here's a real problem: How does he explain the almost identical (supposedly) T-shaped feature on the tower of Thomson's unsuccessful design for the South Kensington Museum of 1864 (*right*)? Or is it, too, a mnemonic of the Solomonic Temple?

My guess is that the T shapes on the doors (and towers?) could even symbolise, in a very direct way, the principle of trabeation which Thomson

came to hold in such high esteem. A T can be read, after all, as a post and a beam. And as for the top of the St Vincent Street Church tower being a representation of Solomon's Seal, I would have thought that many a good Victorian Gothic spire would have provided a closer approximation.

The trouble with all this is, of course, that the Professor has a perfect get-out. If Thomson's (supposed) Masonic affiliations led to him creating a Solomon's Temple in St Vincent Street, then he could not have done it overtly, or his clients and fellow-Masons would both have objected, so it would have to have been cryptic. That means that we should not expect Professor Curl to be able to prove it beyond a shadow of doubt. Unfortunately for him, it also means that he couldn't, if he tried, and that my speculation's as good as his.

*Right: The tower from Thomson's unsuccessful 1864 design for the South Kensington museum complex.*  
*Photo courtesy of NMRS.*

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